

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 8

Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-6

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Keener, Matthew, Session 6, Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-6, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Craig Keener's lecture on Matthew 5-6 examines Jesus' teachings within the Sermon on the Mount, specifically focusing on the interpretations of Jesus' pronouncements on divorce and remarriage. Keener **argues against a literal interpretation**, suggesting that Jesus' statements regarding adultery in the context of divorce are **hyperbolic**, emphasizing the ideal of marital fidelity. The lecture also **explores Jesus' teachings on oaths, revenge**, and loving one's enemies, **analyzing the use of hyperbole** in these passages and **highlighting the underlying principles of integrity, forgiveness, and selfless love**. Finally, Keener discusses Jesus' instructions on prayer and almsgiving, **contrasting hypocritical displays of piety with genuine acts of faith**.

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Keener, Matthews, Session 8 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Gospels – Acts → Matthew).



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3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. Craig Keener's lecture on Matthew 5-6, the Sermon on the Mount:

Briefing Document: Dr. Craig Keener on Matthew 5-6 (Sermon on the Mount)

Overview: This lecture by Dr. Craig Keener explores the challenging and often misunderstood teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5 and 6, specifically focusing on Jesus' "antitheses," the nature of divorce and remarriage, oaths, non-retaliation, loving enemies, and the proper practice of righteousness (giving, praying, fasting). Keener emphasizes that many of Jesus' pronouncements are hyperbolic, meant to grip the listener and challenge their heart, not to be taken as rigid, literal laws in every circumstance.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. The Radical Nature of Jesus' Teachings (Antitheses):

- Jesus intensifies Old Testament Law, going beyond outward actions to address inner attitudes and desires. He says, "you shall not murder, well, you shall not want to murder. You shall not commit adultery, well, you shall not covet your neighbor's spouse sexually."
- Examples like lust are used to show the depth of God's demand for purity. Keener recounts his struggle with the idea that "even noticing someone's beauty was committing lust."
- These teachings are "for our good," designed to protect us from the pain of betrayal and unfaithfulness. "It's not God that's making these rules to be hard on us. But God knows the pain of betrayal."

1. Divorce and Remarriage:

- Jesus' statements on divorce and remarriage are complex and controversial. He states, "whoever remarries commits adultery."
- Keener argues that the seemingly absolute pronouncements on divorce (e.g., Mark 10:11) are hyperbolic. He notes that interpreting it as literal could cause problems if all remarriages are adulterous.

- Literal interpretation would mean that if someone is divorced they are still married in God's eyes. Keener argues the scripture is clear that this is not true in all cases. "It can only mean that they remain married in God's sight. So, if he's marrying somebody else, he can't be doing that because he's married to her in God's sight."
- He points out that Jesus' other teachings assume the *dissolubility* of marriage, not that it is permissible but that it can be ended.
- He highlights the "exception clause" in Matthew (5:32 and 19:9) which allows for divorce in cases of *porneia* (sexual immorality), noting this is a broader term than adultery. "The meaning means sexual immorality. It's actually wider than *moikeia*. It's actually wider than adultery, rather than narrower."
- Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:15 also allows for an exception when an unbelieving spouse leaves, stating "the believer is not under bondage in such cases." This language is directly associated with freedom to remarry.
- The key is that the believer is not the one breaking the marriage covenant in such exceptions. "What Matthew's and Paul's exceptions have in common is the believer is not the one breaking the marriage."
- Keener suggests that, analogously, cases like abuse might also be grounds for separation due to the breaking of the marriage covenant. "If the husband is beating his wife, if the wife is putting arsenic or other kinds of poison in her husband's coffee or tea, those kinds of things may be a reason to separate them."
- He argues that Jesus uses hyperbole to emphasize the importance of faithfulness and commitment in marriage, and "The rhetorical function of the language is demand. Preserve marriage."

1. **Oaths and Integrity:**

- Jesus' teaching on oaths is that they are unnecessary for those with integrity.
- "Let your yes function as yes, let your no function as no."
- Oaths are "a poor substitute for integrity" because they invoke God's name, therefore people should just be trustworthy in all their interactions.
- People try to avoid swearing by God, using substitutes like "heaven" or "the hair on your head," but Jesus argues that everything belongs to God, so such avoidance is pointless. "Whatever you swear by belongs to God. Whatever you

swear by is something that God created. And so ultimately, it's referring back to God."

1. **Non-Retaliatio**n and Love of Enemies:

- Jesus goes beyond the legal principle of "eye for an eye" (lex talionis) by calling believers to not take revenge and "turn the other cheek."
- The "turn the other cheek" action challenges honor and societal norms of the time. It was an insult to a person's honor. By turning the cheek you're saying you don't care about their opinion.
- This teaching is meant to emphasize leaving our honor in God's hands, and loving enemies. "Jesus is challenging us not to defend our honor but to leave our honor in God's hands."
- Keener illustrates that this may be hyperbolic in some ways, but "the point of hyperbole is to grip our attention and make us considerate."
- He offers the example of turning over your cloak in court as a way of trusting in God. If someone takes your outer cloak, offer them your inner one, as well. "What matters is your relationship with God."
- He relates this to the principle of loving your oppressors, even national oppressors. The examples of soldiers requisitioning goods or service from Jewish people are used. "Jesus goes beyond not resisting to actively cooperating."
- He challenges listeners to consider loving those who have wronged them even when it is hard, relating his own struggle with loving jihadists who had harmed his friends. "The issue wasn't, was I allowed to hate them in my heart? Or did I have to love them in my heart?"
- "Jesus loved his enemies when he went to the cross and died for us. Because while we were his enemies, he laid down his life for us."
- He notes that the principle, even when the details are hyperbolic, is "that the principle of love has to prevail."

1. **Being Perfect as God Is Perfect:**

- Keener states that in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, "be perfect or blameless with the Lord your God" is used.
- He suggests the Aramaic word used could mean 'whole,' 'perfect,' or 'merciful.'

- He says, "If God's the standard, none of us can boast."

1. **The Nature of Righteousness:**

- Righteousness should be done for God's glory, not for human recognition. "Don't do your righteousness to be glorified by others."
- Jesus uses the examples of giving, praying, and fasting to illustrate how easily these can become ways of seeking human praise. "Don't do your charity so others will see it and honor you. Don't do your prayer before others so they'll see you and honor you. Don't do your fasting before others so they'll see you and honor you."
- He emphasizes doing these things in secret, using the hyperbole of not letting your "right hand know what your left hand is doing" in the context of charity. "Don't let your right hand know what your left hand is doing."
- True reward comes from God, not human approval. "If you do them just for God to see, then you'll be rewarded by God."
- Those who seek human praise for their acts of righteousness have already received their reward in full.

1. **Prayer:**

- Jesus teaches that prayer should be done privately, not for public display.
- He contrasts this with hypocrites who pray in public and pagans who use "a lot of verbiage," and pray to manipulate their deities.
- The basis for answered prayer is not the ritual, but the relationship with God as our Father. "It's not that we pile up verbiage. It's not that we get the ritual just right or the formula just right."
- He points out how concise the Lord's Prayer is.

Conclusion:

Dr. Keener's lecture highlights the challenging nature of Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. He emphasizes that Jesus uses hyperbole and overstatement to challenge the hearts of his listeners, pushing them to deeper love, faithfulness, and devotion to God, rather than to a legalistic observance of outward actions. He urges us to grapple with these complex issues, recognizing that a true follower of Jesus should be transformed from the inside out.

4. Matthew Study Guide: Session 8, Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-6

Matthew 5-6 Study Guide: The Sermon on the Mount

Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each:

1. According to Keener, what is the main point of Jesus' "antitheses" regarding murder and adultery in the Sermon on the Mount?
2. How does Keener use the story of the couple who could not have children to illustrate the common view of divorce in Jesus' time?
3. How does Keener interpret Jesus' statement that remarriage constitutes adultery?
4. What are two examples of hyperbole used by Jesus discussed by Keener, and what is their purpose?
5. What is the "exception clause" in Matthew 5:32, and why is it significant in the discussion about divorce?
6. How does Keener use 1 Corinthians 7:15 to support the idea that Jesus' teaching on divorce includes exceptions?
7. According to Keener, what is the relationship between the Old Testament "eye for an eye" principle and Jesus' teaching about turning the other cheek?
8. How does Keener describe the historical context of being struck on the cheek in the ancient world?
9. Why does Jesus say we should not take oaths, and how does the example of Herod Antipas illustrate this teaching?
10. What are three examples of religious practices (charity, prayer, and fasting) that Jesus critiques in Matthew 6, and what is the common thread among his critiques?

Answer Key

1. Jesus' antitheses emphasize that sin begins in the heart; it's not just about outward actions. He is concerned with the intention and the internal state of a person, such as the desire to murder or the lustful desire, not just the act.

2. The story illustrates that divorce was often seen as a legally permissible practice, even when it was a source of great personal pain. It was not simply about obeying a religious mandate about bearing children, but it also showed how legal rights could be used, regardless of the emotional impact on an individual.
3. Keener argues that Jesus' statement is hyperbole, using it to emphasize the seriousness of marriage and the pain of betrayal. However, he argues that this hyperbole should not lead to a universal conclusion that all remarriages are adulterous and must be broken up; context and exception must be considered.
4. Keener discusses the example of the camel and the eye of a needle and the plucking out of the eye as hyperbole. These examples illustrate Jesus' use of exaggerated language to make a point, focusing attention and consideration of the principle behind the statement rather than the literal act.
5. The exception clause states that divorce is permissible in cases of unfaithfulness. This exception is significant because it introduces a nuance to Jesus' strict stance on divorce, indicating there may be circumstances when it is justified.
6. Keener interprets Paul's statement that the believer is not "under bondage" if the unbelieving spouse leaves as further evidence for exceptions to Jesus' general principle about marriage being indissoluble. The phrase "not under bondage" has a history in Jewish law that suggests freedom to remarry.
7. Keener argues that "eye for an eye" was an improvement over previous legal practices because it limited retribution, making it commensurate with the offense. Jesus moves beyond this legal framework and urges his followers not to even make use of that law, going so far as to say do not seek revenge.
8. Keener explains that in the ancient world, a backhanded slap on the cheek was not an attempt to cause physical harm, but rather an insult intended to challenge one's honor. Turning the other cheek, then, becomes an act of defiance.
9. Jesus warns against taking oaths because they often involve invoking God's name, implying that every word should be trustworthy. Herod Antipas's impulsive oath, which led to the execution of John the Baptist, exemplifies the negative consequences of carelessly swearing oaths.
10. Jesus critiques charity, prayer, and fasting when they are performed to gain public recognition rather than to genuinely honor God. The common thread is that righteousness should be motivated by a desire to please God, not to gain human praise, as true righteousness is concerned with the heart, not with performance.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the tension between the literal and hyperbolic interpretations of Jesus' teachings on divorce and remarriage in Matthew 5. How does Keener attempt to reconcile these perspectives, and what are the implications of his approach for understanding other difficult passages in the Gospels?
2. Analyze Keener's argument for the dissolvability of marriage in light of his discussion of hyperbole and exceptions. How does he balance the idea of indissolubility with the recognition of exceptions, and what conclusions does he draw about the nature of Christian marriage?
3. Explore the significance of Jesus' teaching on non-retaliation and "turning the other cheek" in the context of both individual relationships and social justice. How does Keener interpret these teachings? And how are they challenging and applicable in modern life?
4. Examine Jesus' critique of religious practices in Matthew 6, specifically his teaching on giving, prayer, and fasting. What does Jesus identify as the key problem with these actions? and what kind of motivation for doing good does he promote instead?
5. How does Keener's discussion of loving your enemies in Matthew 5 tie in with his view of justice and peace? Discuss how he addresses the tensions between the demand to love our oppressors and the need to seek justice, particularly through his personal anecdote.

Glossary

- **Antitheses:** In the context of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, antitheses refer to Jesus' teachings where he contrasts the Old Testament Law with his new, stricter interpretation.
- **Hyperbole:** Exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally, used for emphasis or effect.
- **Lex Talionis:** The principle of "an eye for an eye" from ancient legal systems, emphasizing a commensurate punishment for a crime.
- **Porneia:** A Greek term that generally refers to sexual immorality, often understood more broadly than just adultery.
- **Moikeia:** A Greek term that specifically refers to adultery, or the act of sexual infidelity.
- **Haggadic:** Related to the non-legal aspects of Jewish teachings, such as stories, proverbs, and ethical lessons.
- **Halakic:** Related to the legal aspects of Jewish teachings, concerning religious law and practice.
- **K'nuyim:** Surrogate objects used for swearing oaths in ancient Jewish practice to avoid directly invoking God's name.
- **Diaspora:** The dispersion of the Jewish people beyond their homeland.
- **Stewardship:** The responsible management of resources, often with an emphasis on caring for the needs of others.

5. FAQs on Keener, Matthew, Session 8, Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-6, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-6)

1. **How does Jesus' teaching on "you shall not commit adultery" go beyond the physical act, and what does this mean for believers?** Jesus expands the concept of adultery to include lustful thoughts, emphasizing that even internal desires can constitute a betrayal of one's spouse or future spouse. This calls for believers to cultivate purity not just in actions, but also in their thoughts and intentions, guarding their hearts against sexual covetousness. It's a matter of fidelity and faithfulness in the heart, not just outwardly.
2. **What does Jesus mean when he says that divorce is akin to adultery? Is remarriage therefore also always adultery?** Jesus teaches that divorce is a betrayal that harms the innocent party. He suggests that in God's eyes the marital bond isn't easily broken, and remarriage can be considered adulterous because the original marriage bond is still seen by God. However, there are exceptions to this based on unfaithfulness in the marriage and abandonment by a non-believing spouse. It is essential to consider all the teachings of Jesus on divorce in their full context, recognizing the potential for hyperbole and exceptions. The main thrust is to make marriage work as much as possible.
3. **What is hyperbole, and why does Jesus use it in the Sermon on the Mount, especially regarding divorce?** Hyperbole is the use of exaggeration for emphasis, and Jesus employs it to drive home key principles. In the context of divorce, the seemingly absolute statements are intended to highlight the seriousness of marital vows and the importance of faithfulness, not to present a literal law that condemns all remarriages as adulterous. It is a method to grip people's attention and make them deeply consider their actions.
4. **What are the exceptions to the rule about divorce and remarriage in the New Testament, and what do they mean?** The New Testament recognizes exceptions to the general principle that divorce is wrong. These include when one spouse is unfaithful to the marriage by way of sexual immorality, or when a non-believing spouse abandons the marriage. These exceptions, as taught by Jesus and Paul, demonstrate that the principle of faithfulness has qualifications, primarily for the innocent party, when the marriage is broken by an act of unfaithfulness, or abandonment, not by the believer.

5. **What is the significance of Jesus' teaching on oaths, and how does it apply to Christians today?** Jesus argues that truthfulness should be our constant practice, making oaths unnecessary. Oaths invoke a deity as witness, and Christians should be so truthful in their daily lives that their word is inherently reliable. This means our "yes" should mean "yes" and our "no" should mean "no." We don't need to invoke a witness to be trusted.
6. **What does "turn the other cheek" mean, and how should believers interpret it in their daily lives, particularly in the face of injustice?** "Turning the other cheek" isn't about passively accepting injustice but about refusing to seek personal revenge or be controlled by a cycle of honor and shame. It challenges the traditional "eye for an eye" mentality. It's a form of non-violent resistance, demonstrating love and humility even when wronged. It is not an invitation to be a doormat, but a call to trust in God's justice rather than retaliate. We also don't have to defend our honor if we are truly secure in God's love.
7. **How does Jesus' teaching on loving your enemies challenge conventional wisdom, and what does it look like in practice?** Loving enemies means treating them with compassion and kindness, not just tolerating them. It goes beyond simply not harming them; it involves active measures of good will, like praying for those who persecute us. It means not harboring hatred in our hearts and actively seeking their good, following the example of Christ who laid down his life even for his enemies. It requires a shift in mindset from retaliation to one of love and forgiveness. It is also not a call to be naive, but to be loving even to those who have ill intent.
8. **How does Jesus' teaching on inner righteousness (e.g., not doing good works for recognition) in Matthew 6 apply to Christians today?** Jesus criticizes performing acts of charity, prayer, and fasting for the sake of recognition or praise from others. These acts of righteousness should be done sincerely to please God alone. True righteousness is not just about outward actions but also about the heart's motives. This calls believers to avoid hypocrisy and seek to live with integrity and genuine devotion to God, not to seek approval from other people.